

The Legend of the Maco Light

General Overview

Maco is a small crossroads west of Wilmington where the Manchester and Augusta Railroad crosses the road. In 1867 it was known as Farmers Turnout. The legend of a mysterious light appearing there is an old one, dating from soon after 1867. Among the many suggested causes of the light are automobile lights or marsh gas from the nearby swamp.

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to

1. Compare the legend with contemporary accounts of the alleged real incident.
2. Examine how real events become legendary.
3. Compare different versions of the same legend.
4. Discuss how original documents (newspapers, coroner's report, etc.) can shed new light on an old document.

Preparation

Students should read one or more versions of the Maco Light legend, as well as, the transcribed newspaper accounts of the accident that killed Charles Baldwin.

Activities

1. After reading the above, students may play the game of "Telephone". Discussion should follow on how an original statement changes as it passes from person to person. Legends are passed orally and change much as the message does in "Telephone".
2. Discuss or write about possible causes of the lights at Maco.
3. Practice writing a legend by taking the provided bare outline of the legend and adding interesting and atmospheric details.

Enrichment and Extension

Students can act out or read their versions of the legend (see #3 above).

Sources

New Hanover County Coroner's Inquests, 1768-1880, CR 070.913.1, State Archives of North Carolina

Moore, Louis T. *Stories Old and New of the Cape Fear Region*. Wilmington, NC: author, 1956.

Roberts, Nancy. *An Illustrated Guide to Ghosts & Mysterious Occurrences in The Old North State*. Charlotte, NC: McNally and Loftin Publishers, 1977.

Fact vs. Legend

	Charles Baldwin	Joe Baldwin
Occupation		
Date of Death		
Place of Death		
Cause of Death		
Blame for the accident		

Newspaper Articles

The Daily Herald (Wilmington)

January 5, 1856

Just as we are going to press, we learn that an accident occurred upon the Wilmington and Manchester Road last night, at Rattlesnake Grade, by which several persons were more or less injured, among the, Messrs. Charles Baldwin and E. L. Sherwood of this town. Mr. Baldwin's injuries, it is feared may result fatally.

The Wilmington Journal

January 7, 1856

RAIL ROAD ACCIDENT—We learn that a painful accident occurred last night on the Wilmington and Manchester Rail Road, in the neighborhood of Hood's Creek, some eight or ten miles from town. It would appear that on account of some defect in the working of the pumps of the Locomotive engaged in carrying up the night train going west from this place, the Engineer detached the train and ran on ahead some distance, and in returning to take up the train again, came back at so high a rate of speed as to cause a serious collision, resulting in some damage to the train, the mail car being smashed up and some little damage done to the other cars. The most painful circumstance connected with the affair is that Mr. Charles Baldwin, the conductor, got seriously, and, it is feared, mortally injured by being thrown from the train with so much force as to cause concussion of the brain. Mr. E. L. Sherwood, Mail Agent, was also slightly injured. None of the passengers were in any way hurt. Until the circumstances of the affair can be more fully examined into we forbear any comment.

The Daily Herald (Wilmington)

January 8, 1856

We regret to state that Mr. Chas. Baldwin, who was seriously injured by an accident on the Manchester road, Friday evening last, died last night. Mr. Baldwin was highly esteemed for his many good qualities, and his death is deeply deplored by a large number of friends.

The Wilmington Journal

January 14, 1856

THE LATE RAILROAD ACCIDENT

A coroner's jury, summoned by Coroner J. C. Wood, to examine into the circumstances by which the late lamented Mr. Charles Baldwin came to his death, after mature deliberation, report that it was occasioned by a blow received on the head, on the night of Friday, the 4th inst., while acting as Conductor on the mail train of the Wilmington and Manchester R. R., by a collision of the engine and mail train. The jury cannot find, from the testimony, that the Engineer, Mr. Nicholas Walker, is in the least culpable, as there was no light at the front end of the train, which it was the duty of the Conductor to have placed there. Signed by Benjamin Hallett, foreman.

The publication of this verdict of a jury of twelve men, who have fully examined the testimony, is we think, eminently due to the Engineer, Mr. Walker, who must necessarily feel sufficiently pained by the circumstance, without having to bear the burden of culpability with which he is not chargeable.

NOTE: The above newspaper articles have been transcribed from the original newspapers on microfilm at the North Carolina State Archives.